

Survival Myth Explained: Can Playing Dead Save Your Life?

When you are in a life or death situation with just a few seconds to a minute remaining, some strategies will work better than others. Ultimately, you'll be locked into your decision to stay and fight it out until you win or you die, or to try and escape.

Playing dead is one of these strategies: a double edged sword that you should handle carefully. It can help you, or it can also cost your life instead of saving it. In the end, it all depends on the mindset and will of those you encounter, humans and animals equally.

Let's have a look at some different scenarios and what is likely to happen if you try to play dead. It will help you build the mindset you need to survive!

Scenario 1: Active Shooter Scenarios

Police say most active shooters can take months to years to plan out and gather everything they need to carry out their final scene.

On the other hand, you might not be prepared to face this challenge and have to think fast to find a way to survive. So, are you going to play dead to stay alive? Before deciding, consider that:

- An active shooter most likely has a real, imagined, or socially induced grudge or grievance.
- The shooter has already decided that violence is the only answer.
- This person has more than likely listened to music,

played video games, or read materials that encourage the expression violence.

- The shooter has also decided that killing others is an acceptable outcome even if they are not directly associated with the grievance or similar to those that are directly associated.
- The shooter may have communicated his/her intent to others, thus making a commitment to follow through.
- Has already developed a plan, rehearsed it, and acquired weapons.
- Ultimately, has a sense of hopelessness, desperation, and despair.

An active shooter is locked into a drama inside his/her head, and they may or may not be paying attention to how many people they have actually killed. Rather, as long as people go down, and there is plenty of blood around, they may assume you are dead if you look dead.

During [the Charleston church shooting](#), it was Dylann Roof's belief that he was there to start a race war. He chose the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston South Carolina because it is one of the United States' oldest continuous running Black churches.

Each victim was shot multiple times to ensure that they were dead. One survivor of the killing spree, did, in fact, escape detection by laying in her own son's blood and playing dead. The survivor was very lucky this strategy worked, however not every shooter would or will just pass a still body, especially if they have a good sense of where their bullets have struck.

That being said, following the Paris terrorist attacks the United Kingdom's Terrorism Security Office issued new guidelines that amount to:

- **Run** – Clear the active shooting areas as fast as possible without getting shot.

- **Hide** – Find a safe place to hide. Wait for the police or other proper authorities to come and get you.
- **Tell** – Tell the authorities everything you saw, did, and noticed during the active shooting event.

The US Department of Homeland Security's guide for an [active shooting situation](#) following the San Bernardino California incident also say that people should run and hide. Instead of "tell", they recommend, as a last resort, making an improvised weapon and fighting to protect yourself and others.

But in an active shooting scenario, no professional or professional organization that I know of, recommends playing dead. I don't recommend it because, in a split second, it is very hard to tell exactly what kind of person you are dealing with or what is going on in their sick little mind.

There have been volumes written on the difference between a crazy person acting out a drama for personal benefit and a terrorist that is more interested in killing as a social statement instead of an emotional one. In fact, some even say there is no difference at all, or that a person can change as the situation progresses.

ACTIVE SHOOTER RESPONSE

LEARN HOW TO SURVIVE A SHOOTING EVENT



RUN



HIDE



FIGHT

CALL 911 ONLY WHEN IT'S SAFE TO DO SO



RUN



HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN



EVACUATE



LEAVE YOUR BELONGINGS



HELP OTHERS
IF POSSIBLE



DO NOT MOVE
WOUNDED PEOPLE



HIDE



BE OUT FROM
SHOOTER'S VIEW



LOCK DOORS
AND BLOCK THEM WITH FURNITURE



KEEP YOUR OPTIONS
FOR MOVEMENT



SILENCE PHONE



BE QUIET



FIGHT



ACT AGGRESSIVELY



INCAPACITATE
THE ACTIVE SHOOTER



THROW OBJECTS



YELL AND CALL FOR HELP

**FIGHT ONLY
AS A LAST RESORT

BE PREPARED**



CALL 911



CALL 911
WHEN YOU ARE SAFE



GIVE INFORMATION
TO THE OPERATOR



FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS
OF POLICE OFFICERS



DROP ANY OBJECT



KEEP HANDS VISIBLE

Scenario 2: Terror Attacks

If you are in a [terrorist attack](#), run, try to escape, and take as many others with you as possible. If you do play dead in a terrorist attack, it is likely the terrorist will not see an end of a life. Instead, they may see a body that can be used to “send a message” to anyone who is watching.

It is nothing for a terrorist to mutilate a dead body while video taping their escapades. Later on, it will become a training video and inspiration for others, as well as the means to terrorize their sworn opponents. In the end, if you can't escape, you must fight to the death.

Scenario 3: Armed Robberies

For many people living in the cities or suburbs armed robberies are an every day event. If you cooperate with the robber most of the time they will not hurt you because they just want valuables. If you try to fight back, the robber could very easily shoot you or stab you.

On the other hand, if you fake being sick (such as having a seizure or heart attack), or pretend to fall over dead while playing sick, the robber may leave the scene abruptly.

Robbers do not want undue attention drawn to the area during the robbery. A lot depends on how the robber responds to stress and what is in their mind. Where some will run, others may kick you, stamp on you, or shoot you.

Playing dead is very dangerous in any type of armed robbery. They may even put a bullet in you just to make sure you can't act as a witness later on.

Scenario 4: Domestic Violence

The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically. However, the one constant component of domestic violence is one of the partner's constant efforts to maintain power and control over the other.

Domestic violence also usually intensifies over time. It can begin with simple name calling and end up with great bodily harm and psychological damage. In all too many cases domestic violence ends in death.

Domestic violence does not always end when the victim escapes the abuser, tries to terminate the relationship, or seeks help. The abuser will continue to stalk, threaten, and try to control the victim after the victim has escaped. As a result, the victim is usually in the most danger following an attempt to exit the relationship. 20% of victims of domestic violence with restraining orders are usually found murdered within 2 days after obtaining the court order.

Quite frankly, playing dead in this situation is not a viable answer. It will not stop the beatings or the violence. If the person has decided to kill, or is in an uncontrollable rage, your stillness may be an invitation to carry out more violence until you are actually dead.

As with other violent situations, you must move to escape and ask for help, or you must fight for your life.

Scenario 5: Street Fights

If you run into an experienced street fighter it means that he is strong, aggressive, and can throw extremely hard punches with good knock down power. It also means that this fighter will be willing to bite you, choke you, claw at your eyes, or use what are considered dirty tactics.

There are many methods that you can practice to take your [street fighting skills](#) to a successful level, however playing dead isn't one of them.

Consider that it is very common for a street fighter to try to choke you. Pretending you are dead will more than likely result in your neck being twisted and broken until you are actually dead.

You can use feints or false relaxing to gain an edge, however those are advanced skills that must be carried out in a split second. You must learn and practice often to know when and how to use them. They bear no resemblance to playing dead for several moments.

Scenario 6: Animal Attacks

The best way to avoid wildlife problems is to use common sense. Be aware of what's around you, what kind of animals you are likely to encounter, and the danger they pose. The most dangerous animals that you'll run into in North America are cougars, bears, moose, deer, elk, buffalo, wolves, and coyotes.

When interacting with dangerous large animals of North America you may have to fight these animals in order to survive. Sometimes playing dead may be your only option to survive these vicious attacks.

Unlike dealing with humans, animals are more predictable within their species. Wild animals may maul and seriously injure a human, but they will stop short of killing and simply walk away. Man, on the other hand, kills for fun and sport; and will carry through to ending a life.

Here are some observations about wild animals you may encounter, and whether or not it is a good strategy to play dead around them.

Bear

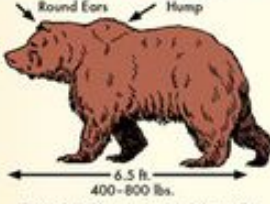
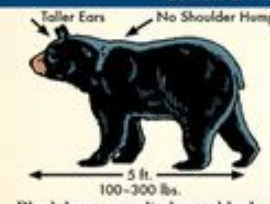
Bears are extremely dangerous regardless of the species. They are most inclined to attack when you surprise them, they think you are competing for food, you corner them, or get between a mother and her cubs.

Even the less dangerous bear species will attack when they are hungry. Only play dead when you cannot escape and all else fails.

You might get bit, or even clawed. Unless the bear is hungry, it should leave after that. If you panic while you are playing dead, do not get up, and start to run away. The odds are the bear will run you down and kill you.

MANLINESS

How to Survive a Bear Attack

How to Identify a Grizzly (Brown) Bear	Stay Prepared	Encountering a Grizzly	If Charged
 Short, Round Ears Shoulder Hump 6.5 ft. 400-800 lbs. Found in Europe, Asia, Canada, and U.S. Pacific Northwest.	 Bear Spray 1. Always carry bear spray. 2. If you suspect bears in the area, make noise. Sing, talk to yourself, etc. 3. Never leave food on trail. Always pick up all trash, even organic.	 Walk away slowly. Don't run. Retrieve bear spray. Be prepared to spray bear; ideally at a distance of around 25 feet. Be as non-threatening as possible; make yourself smaller, avoid eye contact, etc.	 Don't run. Lay on ground and play dead; protect head and stomach. Wait 10-20 minutes after bear leaves to get up.
How to Identify a Black Bear	Stay Prepared	Encountering a Black Bear	If Charged
 Taller Ears No Shoulder Hump 5 ft. 100-300 lbs. Black bears aren't always black; they are often brown or cinnamon colored. Common throughout North America and East Asia.	 Bells Follow the same steps as above. An additional precaution is to add bells to your pack.	 Don't run; stand your ground and make yourself look as big as possible. Shout, wave your arms, create a commotion. Never try to climb a tree.	 If charged, fight back. Aim especially for the nose or other sensitive area. Use rocks/sticks if available. Let the bear be the first to run.

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Cougar

Cougar attacks are no time to play dead or make yourself look small or weak. Under no circumstances do you crouch down or play dead. These large cats are active predators that will stalk, kill, and eat their prey either animal or human.

Moose

Moose attacks can be staved off by playing dead. Curl up in a ball to protect yourself against the kicks and the stomps. Do not move until the moose goes away or it will renew its' attack against you.

Deer

Deer and elk attacks can also be staved off by playing dead. As with moose, curl up in a ball or fetal position to protect your head, neck, and vital organs. The animals will kick at you, but they will eventually leave you alone.

Buffalo

Buffalo are always risky to deal with, however playing dead works. These huge animals can head-butt, gore, or stomp, in a matter of seconds. If you are knocked down stay down and play dead. Normally after a buffalo has charged it will wander off and resume grazing.

Wolf and Coyote

Wolf and coyote attacks are becoming more common. These are very cunning and highly intelligent animals that stalk their prey by sneaking in from behind to nip and ripped leg muscles to disable their victim. Once you are down the whole pack will swarm in on you for the kill.

Under no circumstances should you play dead. Your best defense is to kill or injure as many as possible until you can escape. Focusing on the first attacker or dominant animal in the pack may or may not work.

How to Play Dead

It is my personal opinion that playing dead to survive a

criminal encounter is extremely dangerous and could lead to your death.

If you do play dead it is a last-ditch attempt to surviving a criminal encounter where the odds are you would be shot or murdered anyway.

- If you are going to play dead, don't just fall to the ground. Make it look like the attack was so bad, you actually died.
- Once you have stopped moving, try to hold your breath. When you must breathe, take shallow slow breaths.
- If you want to watch what's going on around you, keep your eyelids almost closed and look through the tiny slits. Do not make any fast eye movements.
- When playing dead, be ready for the other person to strike you or take other steps to see if you are actually dead. No matter what the test is, chances are it is going to hurt. Unless you are trained to use this split second to attack, chances are your involuntary responses will get you killed.

Skills to Practice

Even though playing dead is not a good idea if you encounter a violent human, it does work for some animals. In the latter situation, you may have to play dead for several moments.

Here are some things to practice:

- **Breath control** – know how to control breathing so that no motion is seen or felt. Use meditation to help avoid panic, and also to breathe as lightly and slowly as possible.
- **Be completely still** for long periods of time.
- **Learn how to look around** a room without being noticed.
- Under no circumstances do you cough, burp, sneeze, pass gas, or make other noises or odors.

Playing dead may or may not work if your life is in serious danger. When encountering humans, use this method only as a last resort. You can use playing dead more effectively when encountering wild animals depending on the species.

Playing dead can be an effective and life saving strategy, however you must know how to use it properly.

Can you protect your own in a life or death scenario? Click the banner below to find out!

This article has been written by Fred Tyrell for Survivopedia.